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FORMER FBI AGENT SAYS BUREAU GOOFED IN MAKING HIS LETTER PUBLIC

BY JOHN NOLAN

A fired FBI agent suing to get his job back said Friday the FBI created "a security problem" by making public his letter admitting he wiretapped phones of U.S. allies' trade missions.

The agency says he was fired because he refused to get a physical examination to determine whether he was too overweight to work.

David L. Castleberry's confidential Nov. 19, 1982, letter \_ which he had sent to FBI Director William H. Webster as part of his appeal to be reinstated \_ was included with documents the bureau filed in federal court here last week in response to the lawsuit he filed in April.

"I think that was entirely stupid of them," said Castleberry, a 13-year veteran fired last Nov. 15. Asked if he thought the letter's airing posed a legal problem, he replied, "Only a security problem."

The Chattanooga resident said the letter "was never intended to be made public."

Castleberry argued in the letter that he had been a "loyal and dedicated employee," saying he had received special FBI and CIA technical training, worked on coded secret projects in New York, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., and had wiretapped the telephones of individuals, groups and trade missions of U.S. allies. His letter did not disclose which missions had been wiretapped, or the purpose or other details.

"I was involved in the ultrasecret tapping of the phones of the Trade Missions of our allies in San Francisco in the early 1970s," his letter read. "There is a photograph of me in a tunnel under the Soviet Consulate in San Francisco. This photograph has been shown at numerous technical training schools."

Castleberry declined to say whether he or others had dug the tunnel.

He said he planned to talk with his lawyer about what he could discuss publicly without compromising his lawsuit or the FBI's guidelines. The suit names as defendants the FBI, Webster, the Justice Department and the United States.

A spokesman at the FBI's Washington headquarters declined to comment on the wiretapping, saying the agency would not comment beyond what the court documents revealed.

The FBI said in its court response that Castleberry was fired for insubordination because he refused to obey a direct order to go for a physical examination. The agency contends his weight at one point was reported to be 323 pounds, while FBI guidelines prescribe a weight limit of 209 pounds for a man his size.

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But Castleberry said his complaints to superiors that he knew of waste, fraud and mismanagement within the FBI contributed to his firing.

His letter said: "I set forth numerous instances and incidents which constitute fraud, mismanagement, waste and corruption within the FBI and now I am told they do not even deserve further inquiry." He did not give details of his allegations.

"If you're in government, you don't blow the whistle," he said Friday. "They tout that you should, but ... if you open your mouth, you're a troublemaker."